

July 29, 2015

Dear Commissioner Miller,

The Tampa Bay Partnership would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your colleagues with the Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for your continued dedication to improving the economic growth and development of Tampa Bay. As the CEO-led regional economic development organization, we understand the importance of the MPO and its mission to improve the overall quality of life for the residents of this area; therefore, we recognize and thank you for your tireless efforts to better this community now and for years to come.

In 2007, the Partnership advocated in Tallahassee for the formation of the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA), which is tasked with developing and implementing a Master Plan to ensure a world-class transportation network to seamlessly move people and goods throughout Tampa Bay. It is for this reason, that in 2014, TBARTA along with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) provided a study and comparison of regional transportation options for the area. This report included a number of recommendations to connect Tampa Bay's key activity centers or its "regional spine." From the Howard Frankland Bridge Replacement to improving the I-275/State Road 60/Memorial Interchange, the earliest steps involve laying groundwork on the region's roads and highway systems.

One of the key components of TBARTA and FDOT's transportation Master Plan includes the implementation of tolled express lanes that would allow drivers to avoid traffic bottlenecks and eventually support express bus service and bus rapid transit. This recommendation was mirrored in the Partnership's 20/30/40 Transportation Vision 2013 – a vision that set key transportation goals for the region by the years 2020, 2030 and 2040 – and was created with the guidance and input of TBARTA, FDOT and the region's MPOs.

The Tampa Bay region has the opportunity to implement a critical portion of the Master Plan thanks to District 7's recent proposal of \$3 billion in support from FDOT. With the help of this funding *Tampa Bay Express* would connect four major economic centers (Gateway, Westshore, Downtown Tampa and the University of South Florida), bring in 84,000 jobs and \$13 billion in economic investment. Mobility in and around Port Tampa Bay and Tampa International Airport would greatly improve, and in turn, Tampa Bay, which is ranked No. 11 nationally for traffic congestion, would double the capacity of its interstate system.

The Partnership fully endorses *Tampa Bay Express* and asks that the MPO also provide its Board approval and support. Additionally, we know that it is vital our organizations work closely with the communities impacted by this project and address concerns, such as community outreach, review of change conditions and traffic noise. We encourage the MPO and FDOT to have continued outreach and consider the progress made in those communities over the last 20 years. We also suggest that FDOT please consider transit as part of the solution in the corridor.

Again, thank you to the MPO for its leadership and guidance in this region. Together, as one, the communities of Tampa Bay have the momentum to progressively become the preeminent business destination in the nation, advancing this community for both today's residents and businesses and those of future generations as well.

Sincerely,

Brian Lamb, Chair
Tampa Bay Partnership

4300 W. Cypress Street, Suite 700
Tampa Bay, FL 33607
Phone: (813) 878-2208 Fax: (813) 872-9356
www.TampaBay.org